

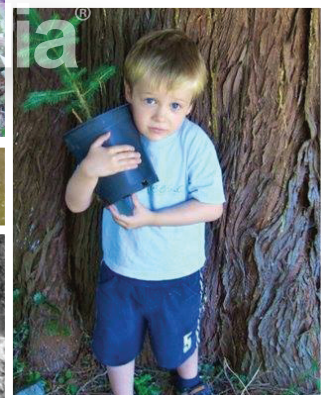
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POINT GREY

LIVING

A Tree for Every Child: Meet Andrea Koehle Jones



Cover photos courtesy of Andrea Koehle Jones

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A Tree for Every Child: *Meet Andrea Koehle Jones*

By Madison Farkas

All images courtesy of Andrea Koehle Jones/ChariTree Foundation



Tucked into Howe Sound off the coast of Vancouver, BC, Bowen Island is home to many trees, but there is one mountain ash in particular that holds a special significance for Andrea Koehle Jones. A journalist, children's author, documentary producer and social entrepreneur, she and her family planted the mountain ash seedling on Earth Day (April 22) 2006 to mark both her daughter Avery's first birthday and the start of the ChariTree Foundation.

As the founder and executive director of the registered Canadian charity, Andrea has facilitated the delivery of more than 100,000 seedlings to schools, camp programs and children's community groups across Canada.

Originally from Toronto, Andrea has worked as a journalist for CBC Newsworld International and Newsworld in Toronto, Yellowknife and Vancouver. She has master's degrees in journalism and geography with a focus on international development, and has worked with various environmental organizations, including with Greenpeace on its campaign to save the Great Bear Rainforest. Her experience fostered her passion for environmental education, and after seeing her own kids' growing interest in it, Andrea knew she wanted her

fledgling foundation to focus on children. She launched it a matter of weeks after the idea first hit her.

"I was inspired by my little kids and their love of nature," she says of Avery and her son Holden. "They're very lucky to have grown up on this tree-topped island, but not all kids have that. I wanted to help kids learn about nature and the power of trees to help the world, especially now."

"I wish everyone would deeply understand that trees are the lungs of the earth, and we all breathe together."

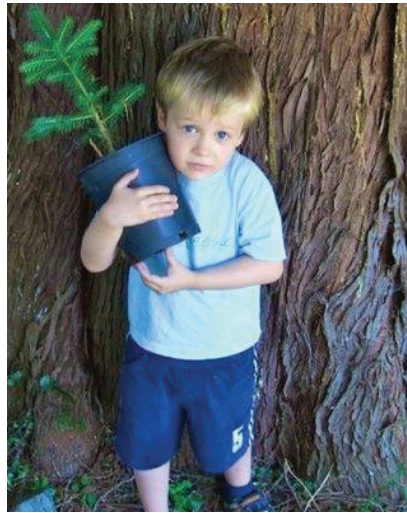
– Shannon, elementary school student from West Bolton, ON

Andrea's mission is simple: to give as many children as possible a tree of their own to plant and care for. She works with local tree farms to source non-GMO, pesticide-free trees that are native to each province. ChariTree has also done international work; Andrea travelled to Zambia to plant fruit trees in 2011.

"The charity system is very complicated in terms of what you're allowed to do in other countries," she explains. "Right now, I'm focusing on Canada, and whenever I have an opportunity, I'll do another international project."

Here in Canada, Andrea relies on teachers and camp directors to ask for trees they otherwise couldn't afford. She and her team handle the logistics and cover the cost of sourcing and shipping the seedlings to school and community groups across





the country. The charity is small and entirely volunteer- and donation-based, and Andrea wants to keep it that way.

“I want people to come to me, so I never solicit donations – all I have is my cute little website and word of mouth. That word of mouth is usually coming from these amazing kids, who are just so interested and passionate about this. I think that’s what makes us extraordinary, that we don’t take any money for what we’re doing. All the money goes toward putting trees in the hands of children – any children.”

Andrea wants to create a deep and lasting connection between children and their environment. Through her environmental education program, she teaches them to be stewards of the planet, protecting and nurturing it both for themselves and for future generations. “Many children these days have less time and fewer opportunities to connect with nature, which is really a loss, because all the research is showing that when kids have contact with nature, they feel better about themselves,” she says.

Andrea calls the trees she delivers “Wish Trees.” Every time a child plants one, they are invited to make a wish for the planet. The wishes, which can be written on recycled paper and tied around the tree as well as submitted online to ChariTree’s website and social media, have ranged from funny to heartfelt to inspiring.

“I wish I had super powers to save the earth and save people,” writes Aidan from Hamilton, Ontario.

Shannon, an elementary school student from West Bolton, Ontario, says, “I wish everyone would deeply understand that trees are the lungs of the earth, and we all breathe together.”

Andrea always loves reading them. “When I see those wishes, or when I get messages from kids who are really excited about it, that’s when I feel like what I’m doing is connecting,” she says.

The Wish Trees is also the title of Andrea’s picture book, which was published in 2008. She’s working on a second book, also about trees, but this time for tween and teen readers.

It’s been more than a decade since she started the ChariTree Foundation, but Andrea has been able to revisit some of the trees from the early years. Her family has since moved away from the home where they planted that first mountain ash, but they still live on Bowen Island, surrounded by British Columbia’s west coast coniferous forest.

Like the birthday seedling Andrea planted for her daughter Avery in 2006, ChariTree continues to grow. It started with only a few hundred trees, but Andrea hopes to have delivered a million of them by the end of the next decade. It’s a goal as lofty as the trees surrounding her home, but Andrea thinks it’s one she and her fellow volunteers will be able to accomplish.

“I’m just so proud of every kid who has planted a tree,” she says. “They’re the ones, especially those who are really excited about it, that are going to be the changemakers, and the world is going to need them. Helping a child plant a tree may seem like a small thing, but what if every child in the world was given a tree to plant? How amazing would that be?”

To learn more about Andrea Koehle Jones and the ChariTree Foundation, go to www.charitree-foundation.org

